In this class, we will consider how politics works at the most micro level – within the minds of both political elites and average citizens. One feature that makes political psychology particularly fabulous to study is that it speaks to so many aspects of political phenomena – from American politics to comparative studies to international relations. Political psychology is important to understanding how religious and ethnic identities contribute to state conflict, how voters are affected by campaign rhetoric, and how the personalities of political leaders affects how political decisions are made. The readings for this course draw most heavily from American political behavior, but you are encouraged to think about applications outside the U.S. case and to bring other examples into class discussions.

course outline

- We will start with an overview of the field of political psychology and the ways questions of political psychology are studied.
- Next, we will study the psychology of elite political behavior, including the role of personality and how political leaders make decisions.
- From there, we will consider the political psychology of citizens, including the mechanisms of how people construct political beliefs and determine political choices.
- Finally, we will study political psychology within groups, including the roles of social identities and stereotypes.

WebCT is your friend

I will regularly update class information on the website for the class at webct.colorado.edu. This syllabus will be posted there, as well as links to assignments and other exciting material.

structure of the class

This class will follow a seminar format, with more focus on discussion than lecture. In the schedule at the end of the syllabus, you will see that each week we will consider another topic of political psychology. Classes on Tuesdays will generally follow a lecture format, where we will talk broadly about the topic for that week. On Thursdays, we will devote the greater share of the class session discussing the topic, particularly the assigned readings for that week.

about the readings for the course

The assigned readings are a central part of this course – to build a working knowledge of the field of political psychology, and also to encourage you to ask questions, develop theories, and think about explanations for political phenomena. Given the seminar format of the class, keeping up with the assigned readings is an essential part of the class. You should complete the assigned readings before class that week. These readings will often raise concepts less familiar to you and offer a level of detail and complexity more challenging than other political science readings you have encountered. When you have questions about what the authors mean or how a passage should be understood, you are encouraged to bring those to class.
textbooks and reading assignments

- A number of other journal articles and book chapters, which can be linked to from WebCT.
  - Some are accessible on JSTOR, an archive of social science journals: www.jstor.org
  - Some are available in the library’s e-reserves: libraries.colorado.edu/screens/coursereserves.html
  - Some are articles from journals available online through the library’s e-journal archives.

requirements

In addition to the readings, you will also be responsible for the following:

**critical analysis response papers** (each worth 10% of your final grade)

At the beginning of the course, you will select three topics from the syllabus and respond to the readings for that week in a two to three page essay. Papers should not be simply summaries of the readings, but should instead analyze and discuss more critically the issues at hand. Response papers are due at the beginning of class the Tuesday that we begin discussing that topic. Additional guidelines are detailed in a separate handout.

**discussion questions** (worth 10% of your final grade)

In addition to the three topics you select to evaluate in your response papers, you will select three other topics to prepare questions for class discussion that week. You should prepare six to eight questions and e-mail these to wolakj@colorado.edu by Tuesday at noon. Additional details and suggestions on preparing questions are elaborated on a separate handout.

**research design** (worth 30% of your final grade)

The final project for this class will be to develop an experimental design to test an interesting question of political psychology (of your own choosing, given instructor approval). You do not need to conduct the study itself, but you will develop the other parts of a research project, such as motivating your question, conducting a review of relevant literature, and discussing how these questions could be tested.

**final exam** (worth 30% of your final grade)

special accommodations

If you qualify for accommodations because of a disability, please submit to me a letter from Disability Services in a timely manner so that your needs may be addressed. You can contact the Disability Services office for more information at www.colorado.edu/disabilityservices.

some important comments on academic integrity

- Plagiarism and other academic dishonesty will not be tolerated. If you are not familiar with the rules of citing sources in written work or what constitutes plagiarism, you should contact me or refer to the University Honor Code at www.colorado.edu/academics/honorcode.
- All papers are expected to be original work, not previously or simultaneously handed in for credit in another course (unless prior approval of all instructors involved is obtained).
class schedule – PSCI 4028

First class session. Tuesday, January 11

What is political psychology?

1. About political psychology

Thursday, January 13

2. Experimental design

Tuesday, January 18 and Thursday, January 20

3. Personality

Tuesday, January 25 and Thursday, January 27

4. Groups and political decision-making

Tuesday, February 1 and Thursday, February 3

The political psychology of individual citizens

5. Personality
Tuesday, February 8 and Thursday, February 10

6. Attitudes and opinions
Tuesday, February 15 and Thursday, February 17

7. Belief systems
Tuesday, February 22 and Thursday, February 24

8. Political cognition
Tuesday, March 1 and Thursday, March 3

9. Inference and heuristics

Tuesday, March 8 and Thursday, March 10

10. Motivation and bias

Tuesday, March 15 and Thursday, March 17

Spring break – class does not meet. Tuesday, March 22 and Thursday, March 24

11. Emotion

Tuesday, March 29 and Thursday, March 31

12. Persuasion and attitude change

Tuesday, April 5
Class will not meet on Thursday, April 7.
13. Media effects

Tuesday, April 12 and Thursday, April 14

14. Group identity

Tuesday, April 19 and Thursday, April 21

15. Race

Tuesday, April 26 and Thursday, April 28

Final exam Saturday, April 30 (7:30 a.m. - 10 a.m.)